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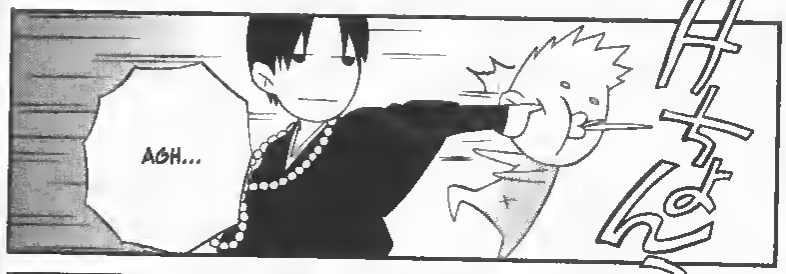
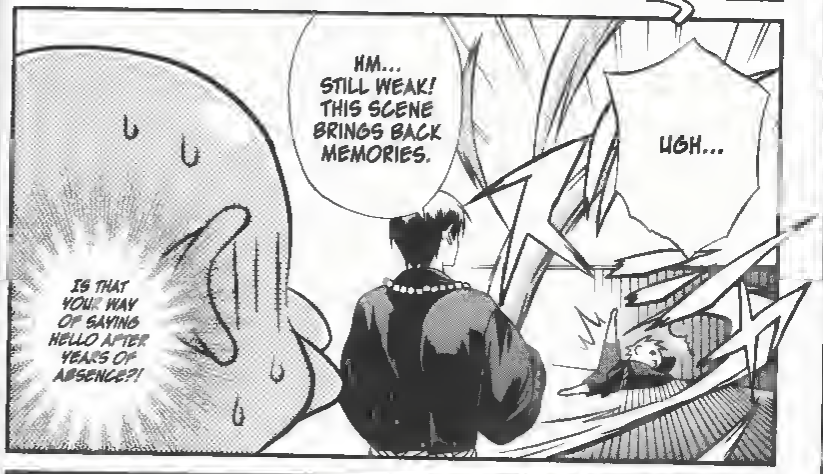
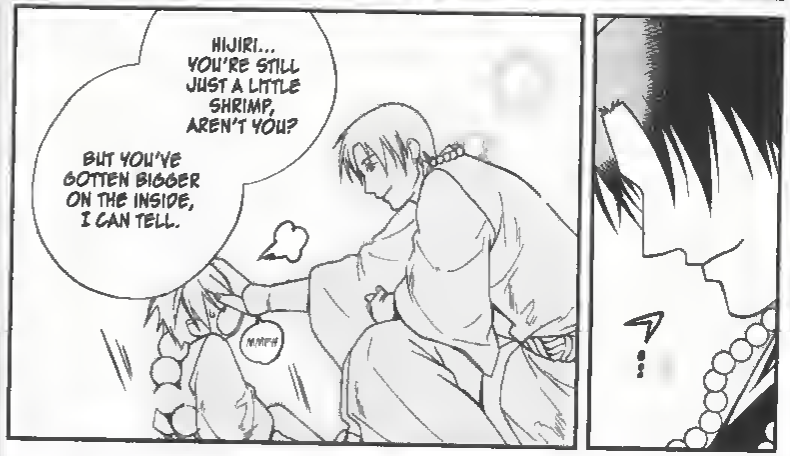
RUB
RUB
RUB
SENJU!


AGH...

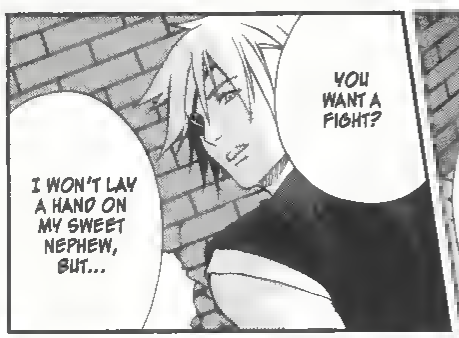

HM... STILL WEAK! THIS SCENE BRINGS BACK MEMORIES.
UGH...
IS THAT YOUR WAY OF SAYING HELLO AFTER YEARS OF ABSENCE?!


HIJIRI... YOU'RE STILL JUST A LITTLE SHRIMP, AREN'T YOU?
BUT YOU'VE GOTTEN BIGGER ON THE INSIDE, I CAN TELL.
MMPH
?!

DAMN, I THOUGHT I'D TAKE YOU WITH US WHILE WE ARE HERE... WITHOUT THIS MEDDLER.
THIS PERSON HAS SUFFERED ENOUGH. LET US LEAVE FOR TODAY.
STOP...
TSURUGI, FINISH HIM OFF PLEASE.
ELDER BROTHER?
I SEE YOUR LACK OF UNDER-STANDING IS AS PATHETIC AS EVER.
IT'S JUST AS YOU SEE.
SENJU... YOU?

SENJU... I...
GET AWAY FROM HIJIRI-SAMA!
?!

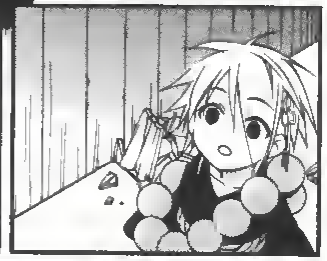
YOUR FEELINGS ARE OF NO CONCERN TO ME.


YOU WANT A FIGHT?
I WON'T LAY A HAND ON MY SWEET NEPHEW, BUT...

LET'S GO, SENJU.
WE HAVE OUR "THICK BLOOD" NOW... OUR MISSION IS NEARLY ACCOMPLISHED.
WAIT!

AND IF WE FIGHT...
YOU WON'T BE AMONG THE DEAD.

I AGREE WITH YOSHITSUNA AND KIKYO'S VIEWS...
...AND I'M HELPING THEM KILL OFF THE MITEOAMASHI SO WE CAN RID THIS WORLD OF DEATH.
IT CAN'T BE...



YOU LEFT ME...SO YOU COULD MURDER?
YOU WERE GONE THIS WHOLE TIME, AND THAT WAS YOUR REASON?

SIX YEARS...

DAMMIT!
LATER!
MICHIZANE KUN WAS TAKEN INTO THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.
WE HAD MANY CASUALTIES FROM THIS INCIDENT.
THE WOUNDS AREN'T ONLY PHYSICAL.
NO ONE HAS BEEN SPARED!
Agh... ow!
Help me
TSURUGI-KUN'S BETRAYAL...
...HAS MENTALLY SCARRED EVERYONE... LEFT EACH OF US SHOCKED AND CONFUSED.
THANK GOODNESS! AT A TIME LIKE THIS!
I'LL BE REASSURED TO HAVE SOMEONE AS LEVEL-HEADED AS MICHITATE-KUN AROUND.
HEY, POPS! MICHITATE-KUN WOKE UP!
R-REALLY?!
No! I don't want to die!
Calm yourself!

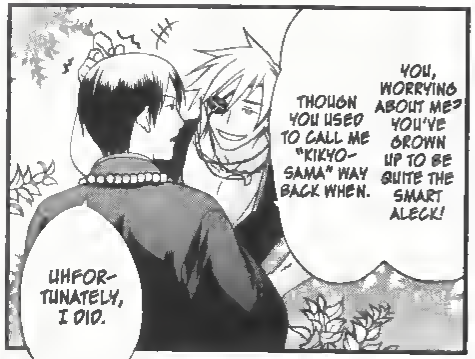
CALM DOWN! FOOLS!
LET GO OF ME! I'VE GOT TO HUNT DOWN YOSHITSUNA!
DON'T MOVE AROUND LIKE THAT!
YOUR WOUNDS WILL OPEN.
HOW DARE HE!
HOW DARE HE!!!
GET HIM.
NOT A SINGLE ONE HAS BEEN SPARED! WHAT TO DO? WHAT TO DO?
EVEN MICHITAKE-KUN?!

AND THE ONLY WAY TO DO THAT IS TO DEFEAT YOSHITSUNA!
WE NEED TO GET THROUGH THIS ALIVE!
SO LET'S GET THOSE INJURIES HEALED!
YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WE HAVE TO DO.
SO STOP FREAKING OUT!

...SAMA?
HIJIRI...

WHAT IS IT, KIKYO?
EVERY-THING IS IN ORDER FOR THE FUSION WITH THE "THICK BLOOD."
WELL...
BUT WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE? AT THE GREAT TREE OF SOULS?

LET'S SHOW THEM THAT WE'LL NOT GO DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT!
ELDER...
ELDER BROTHER!
ELDER BROTHER!


YOU, WORRYING ABOUT ME? YOU'VE GROWN UP TO BE QUITE THE SMART ALECK!
THOUGH YOU USED TO CALL ME "KIKYO-SAMA" WAY BACK WHEN.
UNFORTUNATELY, I DID.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
SEHJU!

IT WAS HOW I ADDRESSED THE PEOPLE I RESPECTED.
HE'S LIKE AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT.

HE SAID HE WANTS TO GET HIS HEAD STRAIGHT. HE'S HOLED HIMSELF UP IN THE WAREHOUSE.

HOW'S THE NEW GUY?
OH, TSURUGI?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I DON'T SEE ANYTHING LIKE A GIFT HERE.
GIFT?

.....

A CALM SMILE.
YOU HAVE THAT SAME SMILE WHEN YOU KILL PEOPLE.

YOU LOST YOUR MIND ALONG WITH YOUR SOUL, ELDER BROTHER.
EVEN IF YOUR POWERS RETURN, YOUR SPIRIT WILL STILL BE UNSTABLE.

I WAS PREPARING A GIFT...FOR MY SON.

I'm gonna tell everyone!
DON'T GET SO DOWN BECAUSE HE HATES YOU, SENJU!
THIS IS WHAT I HATE ABOUT YOU.
HMPH!
I'M GOING TO TEACH MY STUBBORN FATHER AND HIS SIDEKICKS A LESSON!
YOU'RE FIGHTING AGAINST YOUR FATHER AND SENJU-KUN?!
DOES IT BOTHER YOU, HI-HIJIRI-KUN? THAT YOU'RE FIGHTING...

SHOULDN'T MATTER MUCH TO YOU, RIGHT? YOU'RE MORE OF A LONER, ANYWAY.
IT WAS A REUNION FOR YOU, WASN'T IT? AFTER SIX LONG YEARS.
NO NEED TO WORRY. I'M MORE THAN CONTENT HANGING OUT BY MYSELF.
I'M THE ONE WHO TRACKED DOWN TSUKUGI, SO DON'T HANG AROUND US TOO MUCH!
WHAT A DRAG.

THERE'S ONE SNAG — HIS MOTHER. SHE'S ILL, IT SEEMS.
IF ANYTHING WERE TO HAPPEN TO HIM...
I HOPE SO.
MICHITATE-KUN WILL DEFINITELY BE BACK!
HUH?
HIS...MOTHER...WOULD BE ALL ALONE.
WHAT HAPPENED TO "I'M HOME"?
WEL-COME BACK, MICHITATE.
YOU CAN EITHER TELL YOUR FAMILIES YOU'LL BE AWAY FOR A WHILE...
ALL RIGHT, EACH ONE OF YOU GO BACK TO YOUR HOMES!
SEE YOU LATER!
...OR YOU CAN STAY HOME AND NOT COME BACK. IT'S UP TO YOU. NO ONE HERE WILL HOLD IT AGAINST YOU.
ONLY THOSE TRULY DETERMINED TO FIGHT SHOULD COME BACK HERE.

I'M SORRY, I-- THERE'S ONE THING... I MUST DO... THAT YOU WON'T LIKE, MOTHER.
E.
MICHI ...
BUT...
MY FEELINGS HAVE SURPRISED EVEN ME. I THOUGHT I'D NEVER FEEL THIS WAY.
HOW DARE HE!
HOW DARE HE!
RELEASE ME!
I'M GOING TO HUNT DOWN YOSHITSUNA!

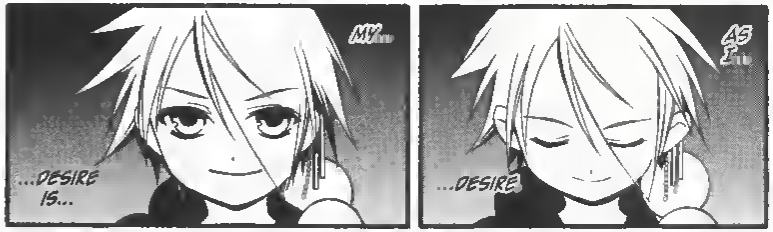
YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE ME?!
IT CAN'T BE...NOT YOU TOO, YOU'RE GOING TO ABANDON ME?!
...?! MICHITATE?!
I'LL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU, MOTHER.

I'D LIKE YOU TO LET ME DO WHAT I MUST.
WHEN THIS IS OVER, I'LL COME BACK...
AND A THOUSAND TIMES...
TEN THOUSAND TIMES...
I'LL SAY TO YOU, "I'M HOME."
HOW DARE HE!
.....
I CANNOT TELL YOU MORE THAN THAT.
BECAUSE I CARE TOO MUCH FOR YOU, MOTHER.
ONLY...I ASK YOU TO TRUST ME.
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, I'LL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU, MOTHER.

UGH!
WHERE'D THIS TATTERED PIECE OF PAPER COME FROM?! IT'S COVERED IN SAND.
Live as you desire.
HIJIRI...DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'RE FIGHTING AGAINST YOUR FATHER?
I'M GOING TO CONVINCE MY STUBBORN FATHER AND HIS FOLLOWERS.
THE APARTMENT WHERE SENJU AND I LIVED.
THERE'S A NEW NAME ON THE DOOR NOW.
THIS APARTMENT BRINGS BACK MEMORIES!
IT'S POSSIBLE...THAT I MIGHT...KILL SENJU...
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS?
WHAT!
I...
I!
WHY AM I LETTING IT BOTHER ME SO MUCH?!

AM I THE FIRST TO ARRIVE?
MI-MICHITATE-KUN!
GREET-INGS.
HEY! DID I KEEP YOU WAITING?!

Live as desire.
...DESIRE!
AS I...
I GUESS THEY ALL CHICKENED OUT...
NO ONE'S COMING.



TO DO ALL I CAN TO RECLAIM THE HEARTS OF MY LOVED ONES!

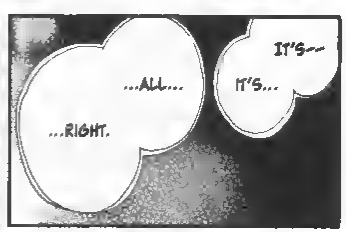
SENJU-KUN... AT THIS MOMENT, THEY ARE DEFINITELY AT THE "GATE-KEEPERS' HIDDEN VILLAGE."
YOU'RE AWARE, ARE YOU NOT, THAT EVERY DOOR IN THIS BAR LEADS TO EVERY CORNER OF THE COUNTRY, RIGHT?
AMONG THOSE DOORS, ONE...
...LEADS STRAIGHT TO THE HIDDEN VILLAGE!
Chirp Chirp Chirp
Chirp Chirp
AND ...SO GATHERED ...
ONLY THOSE TRULY DETERMINED TO FIGHT SHOULD COME BACK HERE!
THREE PEOPLE.
BATTLE?
UH... NOPE.
BUT AS THE OWNER OF THIS BAR, THOUGH, I KNOW ALL ABOUT ITS MYSTERIES AND SECRETS.
AGHH! YOU'RE REALLY PISSING ME OFF!
...AND I'VE NEVER HELD ANYTHING HEAVIER THAN CHOP-STICKS.
I'VE NEVER BEEN A PART OF ANY BATTLE BEFORE ...
A NUMBER RAPIDLY REDUCED TO TWO.
NO?

HOW DO YOU FEEL?
CHIRP CHIRP CHIRP
MISERABLE.
HOW ELSE?
BY POSSESSING MY BODY?
IT'S ALL RIGHT...I WILL SOON ERASE THOSE FEELINGS FOR YOU.
.....
I'M TRULY... SORRY FOR WHAT I MUST DO TO YOU.
HM?
UGH... DON'T CRY. IT'S CREEPIN' ME OUT.
YOU WILL FALL INTO AN ETERNAL SLEEP.
I'M TRULY SORRY.
I'M SORRY.

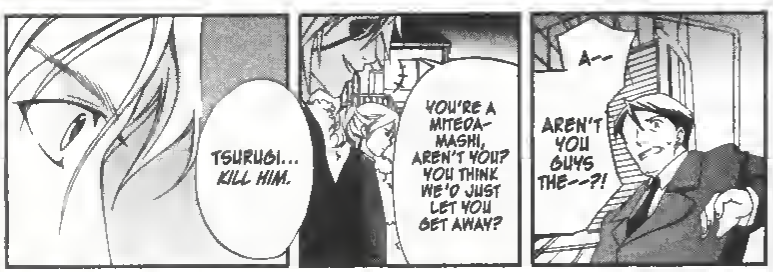
?!
I'M BEING SWALLOWED... BY THE TREE!
SAVE...

HIS WORDS ARE SO NICE...I FEEL LIKE MY FEAR...ALL MY FEELINGS COULD JUST POUR OUT OF ME.
...NGH.
BUT I DON'T WANT TO SHOW THE ENEMY MY WEAKNESS.

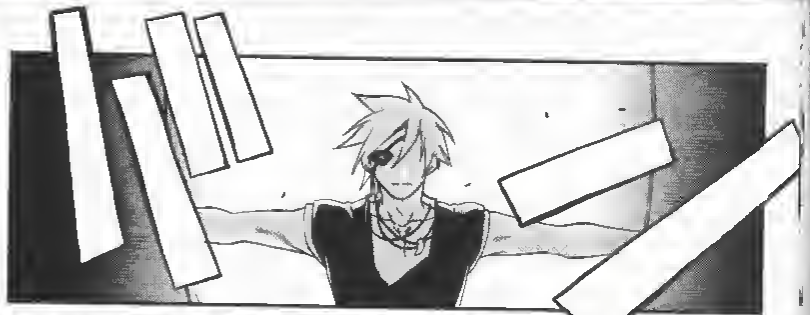
IF YOU'RE SO DAMN SORRY, WHY ARE YOU DOING IT?
THAT JERK, MR. EYE PATCH!


IT'S--
IT'S...
...ALL...
...RIGHT.

S-S-SOON-N-N...
...YOU WON'T FEEL ANYTH-TH-TH-ING.


TSURUGI... KILL HIM.
YOU'RE A MITEOA-MASHI, AREN'T YOU? YOU THINK WE'O JUST LET YOU GET AWAY?
A--
AREN'T YOU GUYS THE--?!

HELP!
EEEOH...
H--
THUMP
DOOP
.....
KA-CHK



LET'S GET TO WORK. IT'S TIME TO HUNT MITEOAMASHI FROM HERE ON OUT.
YOU DIDN'T MESS WITH ANY-THING IN THE WAREHOUSE, DID YOU, TSURUGI?!
HOW LONG DO YOU PLAN TO HANG OUT IN HERE?

I'M HOME!

PAPA?
AIKO!
I BEG OF YOU! SPARE THE CHILD!
PLEASE DON'T HURT MY DAUGHTER!

YOU WENT EASY ON THEM.
EGH- EEEGH!
LET'S GO.

PAPA?
!!
.....

ARE YOU SURE THAT WOUND ON YOUR BACK IS OKAY?
Y-YEAH.
IT WAS JUST A SLICE OF SKIN.
O-OH.

!
I LIKE THE LITTLE STINKERS. CUT THEM A BIT OF SLACK, WILL YOU?
YOU WON'T KILL PARENTS IN FRONT OF THEIR CHILDREN?
THE ARM THAT I JUST SLICED THROUGH...
...HAS ALREADY HEALED?

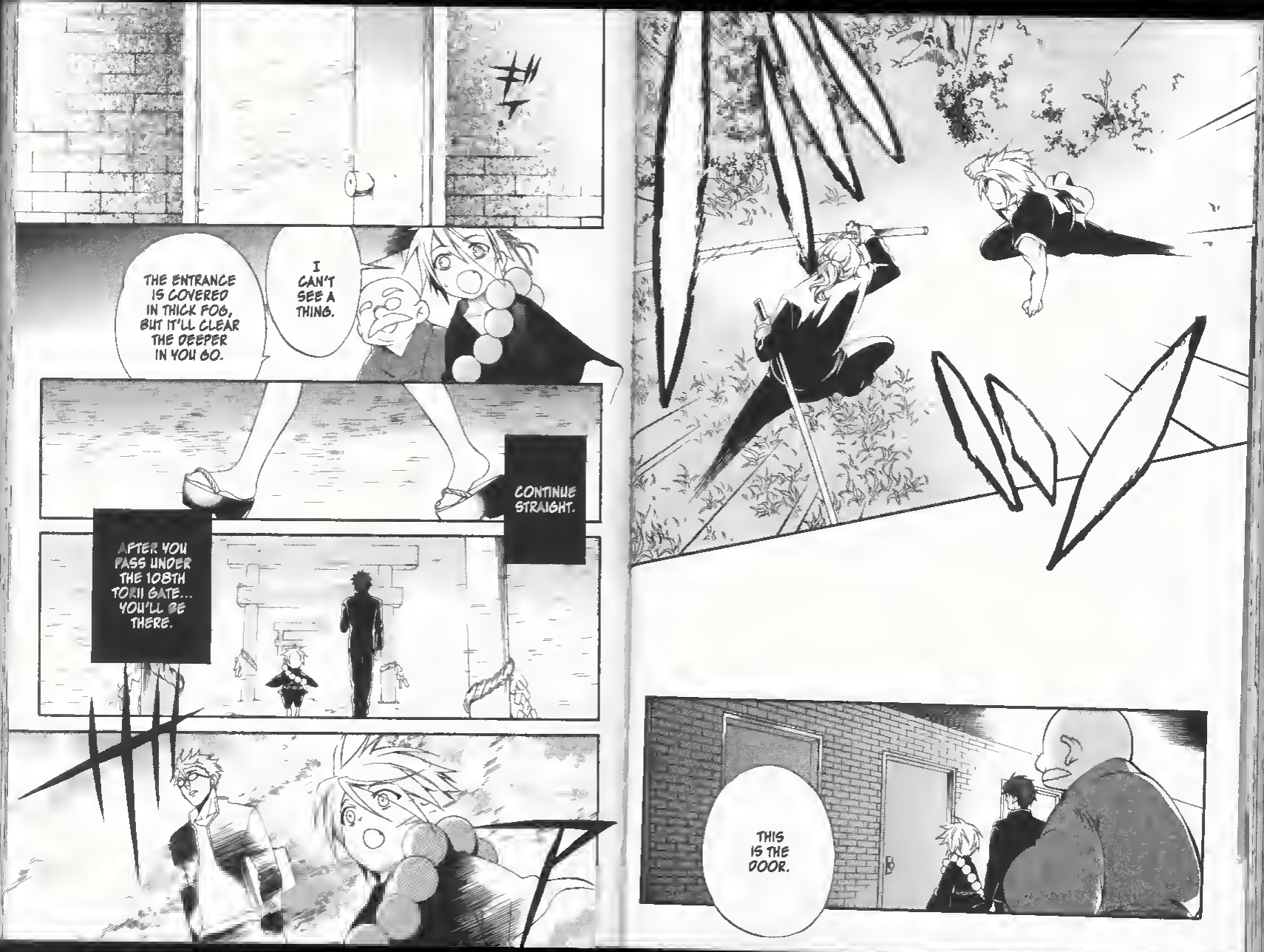
K Chak
WHAT? THEY LOCKED THE DOORS TODAY.
ナヨロ
JUST AS I THOUGHT.
BOOM
IT TURNS OUT THAT NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS HE NEVER GETS WOUNDED.
OW, OW!
WAHH!
...MITE-DAMASHI HUNTING.
THIS IS STARTING TO BORE ME! LET'S HEAD BACK, TSURUGI.
AND HE'S NEVER THAT INTO...
IS THERE ANYTHING... WORTH MESSING WITH?
WAREHOUSE?
YOU DIDN'T MESS WITH ANYTHING IN THE WAREHOUSE, RIGHT!
AND, FOR WHATEVER REASON, EVERYDAY...
...HE SHOWS UP AT THE WAREHOUSE WHEN I'M HOLED UP.

SPY? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
DIDN'T I GIVE UP MY CLOSEST FRIEND FOR MY LITTLE SISTER'S SAKE?
ARE YOU A SPY... TSURUGI?!
SNOOPING AROUND, ARE WE?

YOU'RE A "SPIRIT ENTITY."
AND IF PHYSICAL ATTACKS HAVE NO EFFECT ON YOU...
...THEN MICHITATE IS AS GOOD AS DEAD WHEN HE GOES TO ATTACK YOU.
TO KEEP HIM FROM GETTING KILLED, YOU CUT HIM ENOUGH SO THAT HE WOULDN'T DIE, HUH?
YOU FOOLED US.

...UNTIL I FOUND AN UNMISTAKABLE WEAKNESS BUT...
I'D PLANNED TO KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON YOU...
...WHEN YOU SHOWED UP AT HAZAMA'S BAR...
THAT ONE TIME...
I REMEMBER WHEN MICHITATE LAUNCHED HIS ATTACK.
BUT THE NEXT TIME WE MET, IT WAS BACK TO NORMAL LIKE NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.
...THE CUT SHOULD'VE SLICED OPEN YOUR SKIN.
WHEN YOU ATTACKED ME AT NIGHT, AND I CUT OFF YOUR EYE PATCH...

FOOL...YOUR FRIENDS THINK YOU'RE A BACK-STABBER...
AND, AFTER YOU DIE, THEY'LL STILL THINK IT.
IT'S GO TIME! I WON'T LOSE SOMEONE ELSE...I LOVE!
"ATTACKS" DON'T WORK ON ME.
HOW DO YOU PLAN ON WINNING?
IT'S ON.


I CAN'T SEE A THING.
THE ENTRANCE IS COVERED IN THICK FOG, BUT IT'LL CLEAR THE DEEPER IN YOU GO.
CONTINUE STRAIGHT.
AFTER YOU PASS UNDER THE 108TH TORII GATE... YOU'LL BE THERE.
THIS IS THE DOOR.

THE GATE-KEEPER'S HIDDEN VILLAGE.
IT AP-PEARS THAT A BELOVED INTRUDER HAS MADE HIS WAY HERE.
MY SON.
I MUST...
...HURRY THIS ALONG.

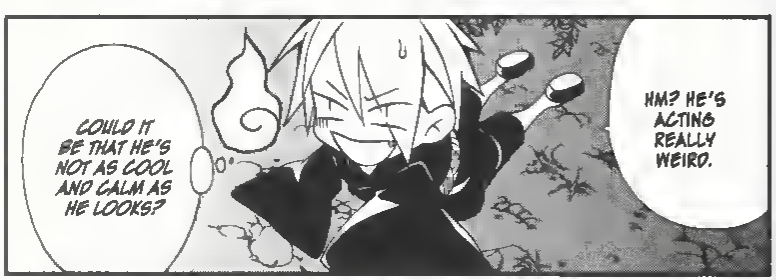
YOU CAME, HUH?
HIJIRI.

HUFF
HUFF
PRETTY BOY'S LOST HIS LOOKS.
BLACK GATE
SOUL.15

HE'S A GHOST...
THERE'S NO WAY I CAN WIN AGAINST THIS GUY!
HIS WOUNDS... VANISH.
LISTEN UP, HIJIRI-KUN.
WHEN YOU ARRIVE IN THE HIDDEN VILLAGE, AIM FOR THE LARGE TREE AT THE TOP.
THE GREAT TREE OF SOULS.
GATE-KEEPERS DRAW THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF THEIR POWER UNDER THAT TREE.
THAT'S WHERE YOU'LL FIND THEM.

!!
NGH!
CLENCH
WHAT THE HELL? THAT ACTUALLY HURT QUITE A BIT. DAMN!
SPLIT

I'M GOING ON AHEAD.
YOU... BASTARO!
YOU'RE HEAVIER THAN I THOUGHT.
GAH!


COULD IT BE THAT HE'S NOT AS COOL AND CALM AS HE LOOKS?
HM? HE'S ACTING REALLY WEIRD.

WHERE?

WHERE
WHERE'D YOU GO?
JEEZ, EVEN NOW, YOU'VE GOT THAT CALM, COOL LOOK ON YOUR FACE.
WILL WE MAKE IT IN TIME?! GOT TO HURRY, MICHITATE!

A WORD, HIJIRI-SAMA.
YOU'RE TOO SLOW.
HM? WHAT'S THAT?

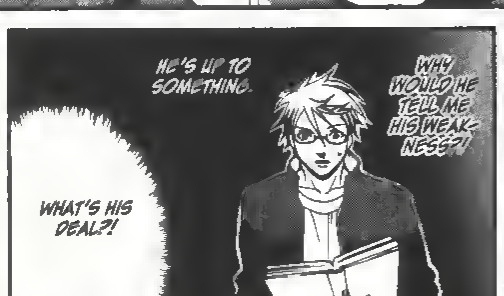
WHOA?!

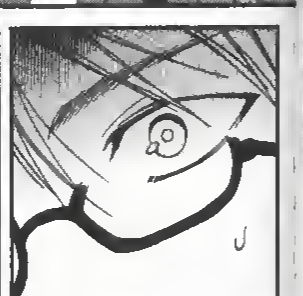
FOR-GIVE ME, BUT--

SORRY I'VE GOT SHORT LEGS!

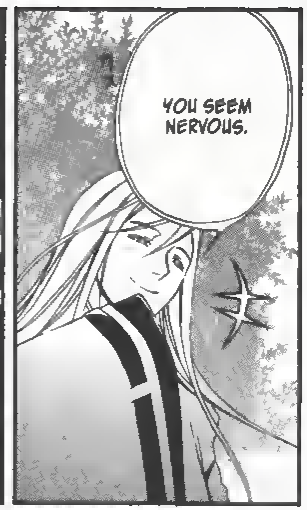
I'M SORRY, BUT THAT'S IMPOS-SIBLE.
YOU THINK YOU'LL DEFEAT ME?
!
BECAUSE I HAVE NO PHYSICAL BODY, I CANNOT BE HARMED BY YOUR ATTACKS.
WHAT?
CAN'T BE! YOU MEAN WHATEVER I DO WILL BE USELESS?!
HE COULD BE BLUF-FING. BUT IF IT'S TRUE, HOW CAN I DEFEAT HIM?
I COME TO CLAIM... MY HALF-BROTHER WHO YOU ABDUCTED.
WHO ARE YOU SEARCHING FOR?
HEY.
WHERE ARE YOU?!
I AM MICHITATE SUGAWA-RA... I AM ONE WHO PROTECTS HIJIRI-SAMA.
LET ME RE-INTRODUCE MYSELF FORMER-MASTER.
HOW-EVER, TODAY, I HAVE ANOTHER PURPOSE.
YOU SAVED ME THE TROUBLE OF LOOKING FOR YOU.
I CAME TO GREET MY SON...
...BUT FIND YOU INSTEAD.

THIS SPHERE IS MY SOLE WEAK POINT.


HE'S UP TO SOMETHING.
WHY WOULD HE TELL ME HIS WEAKNESS?!
WHAT'S HIS DEAL?!



...OUR WEAKNESS?
SHALL I GIVE YOU A HINT ON HOW TO DEFEAT US? WANT TO KNOW...
WHAT?!


YOU SEEM NERVOUS.

YOU SEE, ONCE YOU DIE, IT'S NOT SO EASY TO PRESERVE YOUR HUMAN FORM.
KEEPING A SPIRIT ENTITY IN THIS WORLD REALLY IS A TROUBLESOME AFFAIR. IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL, WE COULD EASILY GET PULLED INTO A GATE.

THESE ARE SPHERES OF CRYSTALLIZED BLOOD. THE BLOOD BELONGED TO OUR FRIENDS WHO DIED DURING THE TRAGEDY THAT BEFELL OUR VILLAGE.
I...HAVE TAKEN WHAT LITTLE POWER IS STILL LEFT AMONG OUR PEOPLE.
AS SPIRIT ENTITIES... OUR SOULS ARE CONNECTED TO THE PHYSICAL WORLD BY BEING IN THE STATE OF "YORISHIRO," WHICH GIVES US OUR HUMAN SHAPE.

KEH.
DAMN
HE SCURRIED INTO THAT CRAMPED WARE-HOUSE.
YOU WANT TO PLAY HIDE AND SEEK?
GRUNT
I CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE. HE'S TOO POWER-FUL.
IT'S DO OR DIE TIME.
THE MAIN PILLARS OF THIS WAREHOUSE. IF I DESTROY THOSE, I COULD CRUSH HIM.

WHY DON'T YOU GIVE IT UP?
ELDER BROTHER AND I ARE ALREADY DEAD.
THERE'S NO WAY TO DEFEAT US, YOU SEE THAT NOW?

HE SHOWS UP HERE EVERYDAY... THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMETHING INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT STASHED IN HERE SOMEWHERE!
STOP ME IF YOU CAN!
JUST A LITTLE MORE!
EVEN IF IT DOESN'T KILL HIM, MAYBE IT'LL BURY HIM UNDER.
THERE'S ALSO THE CHANCE I COULD GET BURIED UNDER TOO.
!!
SNAP
WHERE'D YOU GO? COME ON OUT!
SLIDE
SLICE
BASTARD... THE PILLARS! YOU WANNA BRING THE WHOLE WAREHOUSE DOWN?!

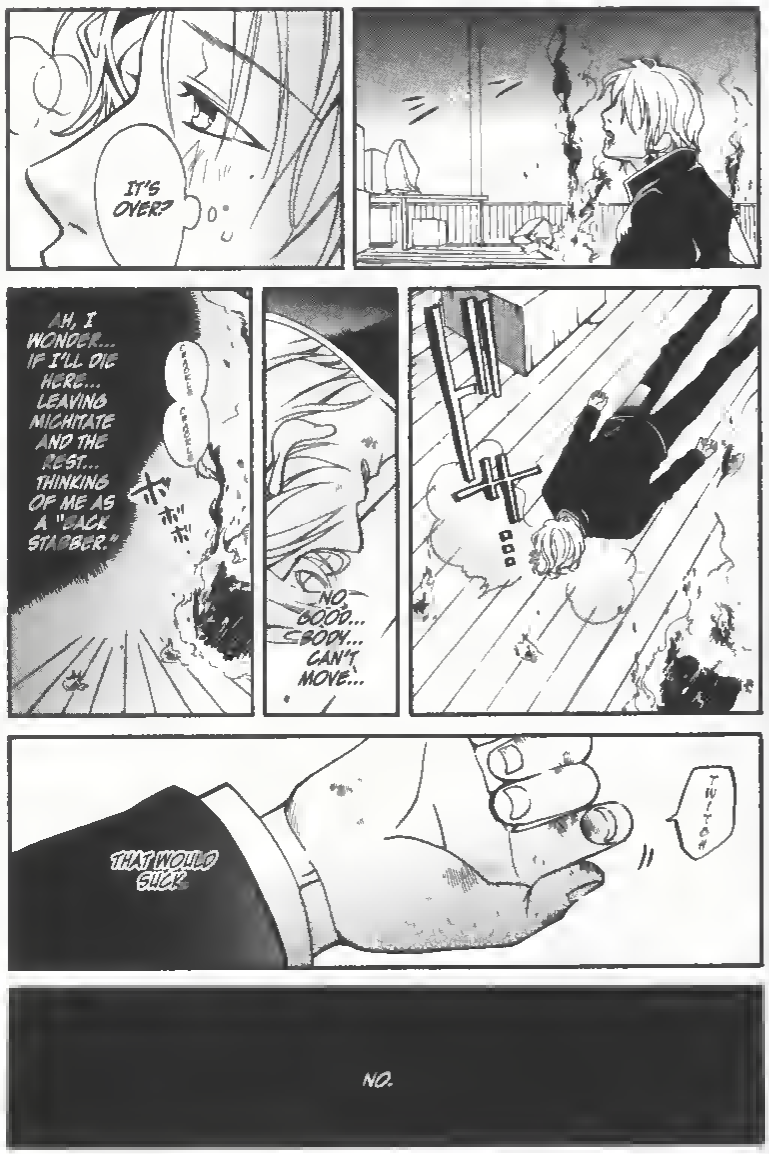
THIS WAREHOUSE... STORES ALL THE ARTICLES LEFT BEHIND BY OUR DEARLY DEPARTED PEOPLE.
YOU DID SOME-THING YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE.
.....
UGH!
GAH...
ロキ
THE POSSESSIONS OF ALL THOSE I HOLD DEAR.
I THOUGHT ONCE THAT I WOULD LET YOU LIVE.
BUT I CHANGED MY MIND.
NOW...
...YOU DIE!!
AGHHHHH!
CHACK

AGHHHH!
WHAT THE?!
...INSIDE HIS BODY?!
A SPHERE...
...I MIGHT KILL HIM!
I'M NOT SURE HOW, BUT IF I CAN SMASH THAT...
CAN'T THINK NOW!
AGHHHHH?!
YOU BAS-TARD!
NGH... WHY?
WHAT? WHY? I'M SO CLUE-LESS HALF THE TIME, I UNDERSTAND NONE OF THIS.
BUT JUST NOW, WHEN I DAMAGED THE SPHERE, HE SEEMED REALLY HURT.

SO YOU'D MAKE ANY EXCUSE TO SPARE THEIR LIVES...
YOU'RE NOT THE TYPE TO ENJOY KILLING PEOPLE.
...AND LET THEM GO.
I'VE HEARD ENOUGH!
EVERY DAY, AFTER KILLING MITEDAMASHI, YOU'D ALWAYS ...
...CONFINE YOURSELF TO THIS WAREHOUSE.
WHA...
EVEN NOW, YOU'RE CONFLICTED ABOUT IT, AREN'T YOU?
WHAT YOUR BROTHER IS DOING. DO YOU THINK IT'S RIGHT?
.....
DURING THE TRAGEDY THAT KILLED MY PEOPLE...ELDER SISTER'S...
SORRY... BUT THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR SPEECHES.
ARE YOU FINISHED?
HUH?
LET'S END THIS...
...BUT YOU'RE ...
...A GOOD GUY, AREN'T YOU?
AT FIRST, I THOUGHT YOU WERE A BAD GUY...
.....?

THE CLOTHES FROM ELDER SISTER'S BODY...WERE TORN!

HUFF
HUFF
KIKYO!
I DON'T SEE ANYTHING HERE THAT LOOKS LIKE HER CLOTHES.
CLOTHES?!
HUH
I BROUGHT MYSELF TO THE WAREHOUSE EVERY DAY.
ARE ALL OF YOU LISTENING?
DID YOU DO THAT ON PURPOSE?
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHAT ELDER BROTHER'S BEEN DOING?
AM I BETRAYING ELDER BROTHER IN QUESTIONING HIS BEHAVIOR?
.....


IT'S OVER?
AH, I WONDER... IF I'LL DIE HERE... LEAVING MICHITATE AND THE REST... THINKING OF ME AS A "BACK STABBER."
CRUSH
CRUSH
NO GOOD... BODY... CAN'T MOVE...
THAT WOULD SUCK.
TWITCH
NO.

I UNDERSTAND.
Though I'm dead myself
THE DEAD DON'T TALK.
I'LL HAVE TO FIND MY ANSWERS ON MY OWN.
WITHIN ME, I ALREADY KNEW THE ANSWER. I RESPECTED ELDER BROTHER...
... NO MATTER WHAT...I COULDN'T BETRAY HIM.

WHY... ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS?
CAN'T BE!
BUT...
GRAB
THIS "YORI-SHIRO" ...
...IS NO LONGER NECESSARY.
!
THE REASON IS THAT...
"YORISHIRO"... MY BOND WITH THIS HUMAN BODY, THAT'S MY WEAKNESS.

NO...
TSU... BA...
...KI...
CRACKLE
CRACKLE
CRACKLE

MICHIZANE
...
...IS BEING ABSORBED!
VERY SOON... THAT YOUNG BOY WILL BE MY "YORISHIRO," AND I WILL BE REBORN IN HIM.
MI... CHI...
...ZANE?

BLACK GATE
the black gate does not wait for the soul to die
SOUL.16
...IF YOU WILL DARE ATTACK THIS "BODY."
LET'S SEE...
LET'S BEGIN.

IT'S ALL RIGHT SOON YOU WON'T FEEL A THING.
SOMEONE... SAVE ME.
AS MUCH AS I SAY I SHOULDN'T EXPECT ANYTHING...
...I STILL DO.
AH...
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
SOMEONE?
WHAT'S THAT?
SOMETHING VERY STRANGE IS GOING ON.

COME IN!
MICHIZANE-KUN, WELCOME HOME AFTER YOUR LONG JOURNEY.
...
I EXPECT NOTHING.
ヒソ
ヒソ
WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?! WHY DO YOU LET RELATIVES PUSH YOU AROUND?!
HMM... WHAT THE HELL WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO?!
I KNEW I WASN'T WANTED HERE.
I'M GOING TO BED.
SEE? I'M DOING FINE, AREN'T I? IT'S BECAUSE I HAVE NO EXPECTATIONS.

I-I-I'VE LOST ALL CONTACT WITH MICHIZANE'S CONSCIOUSNESS.
WE WON'T HEAR FROM "HIM" AGAIN.
THAT'S RIGHT.
THAT WILL DO FINE.
EVEN THOUGH HE'S TAKEN OVER A NEW BODY... COULD HIS "SOUL" STILL BE UNSTABLE?
YOSHITSUNA'S SPEECH SEEMS WEAK AND UNSTABLE FOR SOME REASON.
I-IF YOU ATTACK ME, YOU'LL ONLY INJURE MY VESSEL
TH-TH-THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO NOW. PLEASE CEASE YOUR EFFORTS.
HUH?
WHO AM...
...I"? THIS IS REALLY... WEIRD...
SLEEP/...
"I" AM...
...ATTACKING MICHITATE.

AGHHHHHH!
WHAT DO YOU...
WHAT DO YOU KNOW?!
ALL RIGHT... HE'S COMPLETELY DELIRIOUS! HERE'S MY CHANCE TO SEAL HIM OFF WITH MY "SHIELDS."
* REVERSAL THE INNER-OUTER ORIENTATION OF THE "SHIELD." YOU'LL BURN YOURSELF IF YOU SLAM INTO IT FROM THE INSIDE
?!
SMOKE... IS RISING.

*By reversing the interior and exterior of his shield the enemy can be sealed in (See Vol 2)

"SUCH A WEAK PEOPLE..."
"...DESERVE TO BE ELIMINATED."
"JEEZ... GATE-KEEPERS AREN'T ANYTHING SPECIAL EITHER."
IF SO,
!!
JUST AS I THOUGHT...HIS ATTACKS HAVE INTENSIFIED!
HMPH
"I'LL DEFEAT YOUR BROTHER ALONG WITH YOU TOO."
"QUIT TRYING TO MAKE ME FALL IN LINE WITH YOUR RIDICULOUS IDEAS."
"NOT TO WORRY, SOON YOU'LL BE GONE TOO."
WORTH... LESS?

ギュ
ドサッ

SMOKE!
THAT'S...WHERE ALL THE ARTICLES BELONGING TO OUR PEOPLE ARE STORED.
SMOKE... FROM THE WAREHOUSE?
THERE... THAT'S WHERE ALL THE ARTICLES FOUND ON KUZONOHA'S BODY ARE KEPT!
IT CAN'T BE.
THE WARE-HOUSE...IS ON FIRE?

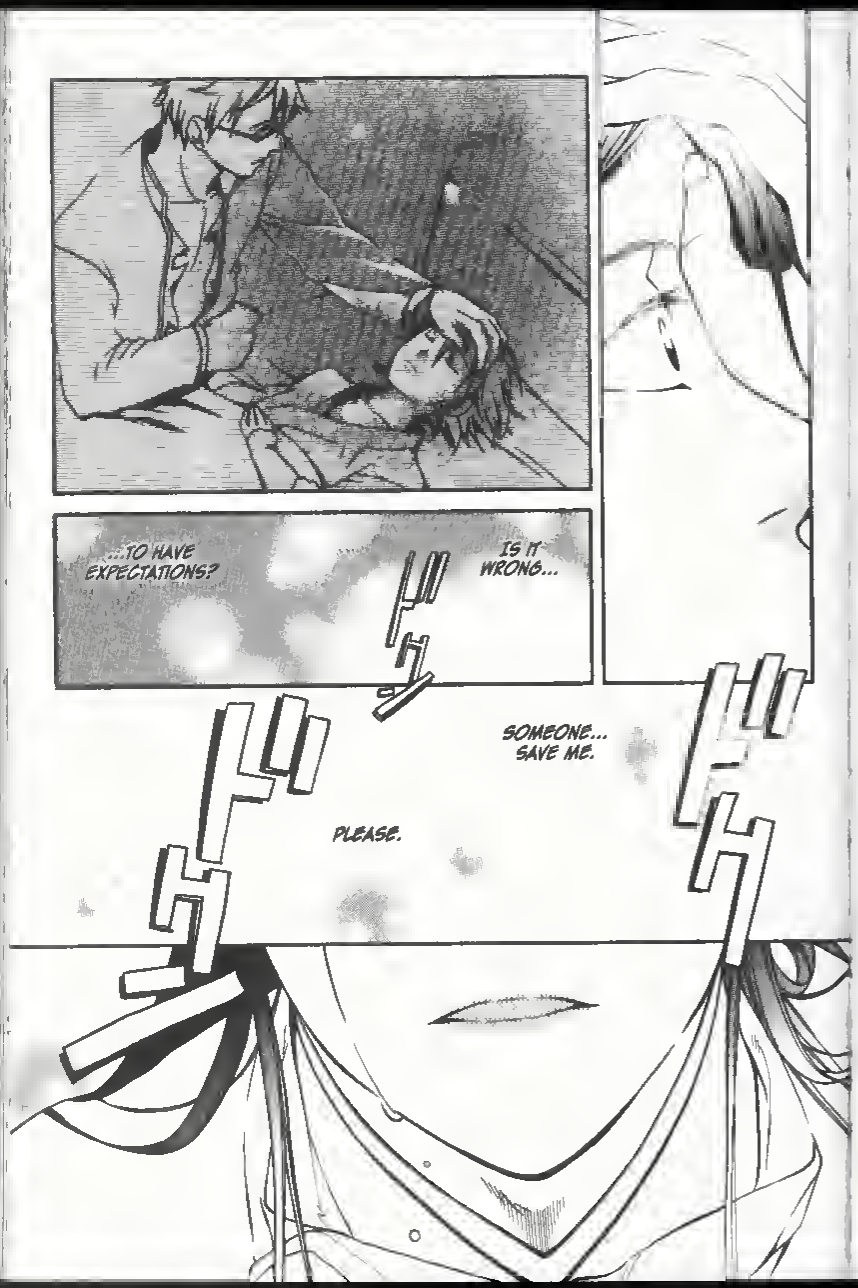
TSUBAKI!
CRAP... WHAT THE HELL?! I CAN'T MOVE...
BIGGLE
W-WAIT! WAIT UP!
TSUBAKI
TSU...
...BA...
...KI.
WHERE AM I?
IS THIS... HEAVEN?
BUT, IT TURNS OUT, I COULDN'T BETRAY MY FRIENDS.
I WANTED TO BRING YOU BACK TO LIFE.
I'M SORRY, TSUBAKI...
AT LEAST NOW, I CAN BE BY YOUR SIDE AGAIN.

IF I'D STAYED UNDER THERE ANY LONGER, I'D BE DEAD BY NOW...
ナデラ……
... DESTROYED.
THE WARE-HOUSE...
THANK YOU.
TSUBAKI...

WHAT'S WITH ALL THESE MONITORS?!
...HU.... MANS.
I SHALL NEVER... FOR-GIVE...
SWIRL
VROOM
ALL GONE...
MY... PRECIOUS... PEOPLE...
THAT SMOKE IS RISING... FROM THE WARE-HOUSE!
IS THIS YOUR HANDI-WORK?
MY WHAT?!
U-U-UNFORGIV...
...AS-E-BLE.

A GATE THAT SIZE COULD ENDANGER THE WHOLE PLANET!
A GIGANTIC... HORRIBLY GIGANTIC... BLACK GATE!!
HA HA HA!
HA HA!
NO CHOICE. I'VE GOT TO KILL HIM!
HOW CAN I...
CLUCH
BUT MICHIZANE...
HA HA...
...KILL HIM?

WHAT IS... THAT...
A TSUNAMI...A TSUNAMI IS COMING!
FIRE!
AGHH! EARTH-QUAKE?!
WHAT THE HELL IS THAT???


...TO HAVE EXPECTATIONS?
IS IT WRONG...
SOMEONE... SAVE ME.
PLEASE.

HEY... GET IT TOGETHER AND WAKE UP.
WHAT ARE YOU TALK-K-K-I-ING ABOUT?
HA HA HA.
THE WORLD WILL BE DE-STROYED BUT...
...I CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO DO IT.
NO MATTER WHAT HAP-PENS, I CAN'T KILL YOU.

MICHITATE, WHILE YOU STILL CAN... KILL ME!
IT'S NO GOOD...I'M FADING AWAY...I'M SUCCUMB-ING...TO YOSHI-TSUNA'S POWER.
I CAN NEVER KILL YOU...

SAVE ME, MICHITATE.
IT'S NO GOOD...
MICHI...
MICHI-ZANE?! IS THAT YOU?!

SOME-THING...
BEFORE I VANISH, I MUST RE-ESTABLISH YORISHIRO!
QUICKLY ...
THE "YORI-SHIRO" IS BROKEN!
A... AGH!
I MUST FIND A HOST BODY!
HIS BLOOD IS THIN BUT...
THERE'S A HINT OF GATE-KEEPER'S BLOOD.
I'LL TAKE OVER HIS BODY!

AGH!
IF YOU'RE GOING TO KILL MI-CHITATE...
...THEN I'LL...

HE'S DYING ANYWAY. I'LL JUST LEAVE HIM.
THIS ONE CAN NO LONGER BE SAVED.
...IT HURTS! IT'S GETTING TIGHT
WHAT'S THIS I'M FEELING? MY CHEST ...
K-KILL....
THIS FEELING...
WHAT'S... HAPPENING?
MY BODY... I'M NOT IN COMMAND OF MY BODY.

PHEW... THAT WAS A CLOSE ONE.
HIS BLOOD IS TOO THIN...SO I CAN'T FUNCTION FULLY IN THIS BODY BUT...

HUFF
HUFF
I KILLED... MICHIZANE.
HUFF
HUFF
HERE I AM...AT THE BIG TREE, AT THE VERY TOP.

WHY? WHAT IS THIS TAKING OVER ME?
I FEEL THAT I MAY BE ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING HORRIBLE.
DIE...
MUST KILL...
PLEASE DIE!
HIS BREATHINGS AND HEART HAVE STOPPED... GOOD.. I KILLED HIM..
Cough

WE CAN FINALLY TALK FACE TO FACE...
SENJU!
HEY!

EVER SINCE I WAS BORN, YOU WERE WITH ME EVERY DAY.

YOU ARE MY "WORLD."

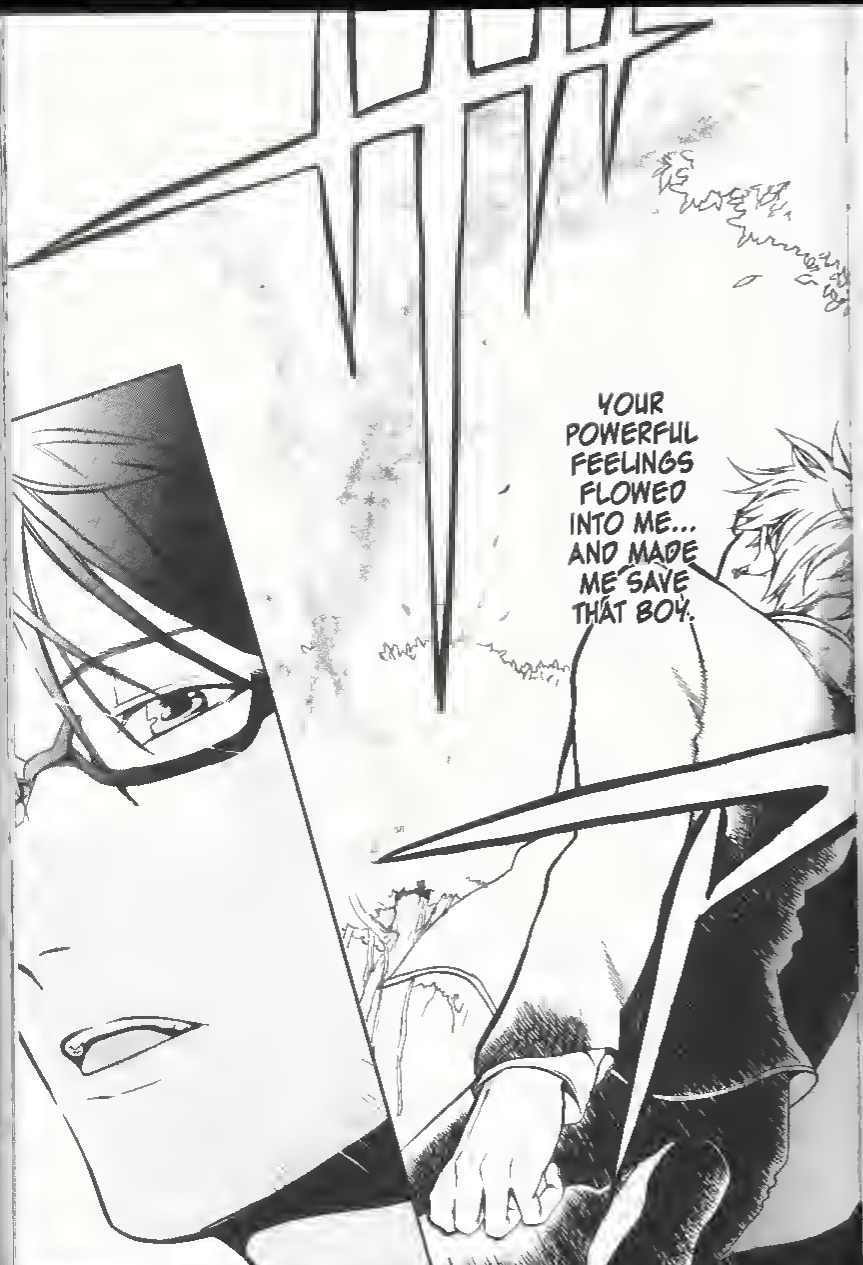
I...
...KILLED HIM!
I CAN BARELY REMEMBER... YOSHITSUNA...
.....
ARE YOU POSSESSING ME...NOW?
CHOKE
I'LL DESTROY YOU.
MY APOLOGIES FOR KILLING WITH YOUR HANDS.
I HAD... NO OTHER CHOICE.

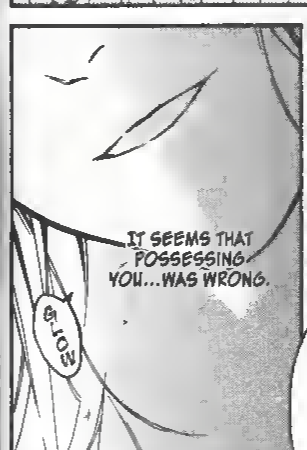
WHA--?! WHERE'S YOSHI-TSUNA?
!!

HOLD YOUR HAND OVER MICHIZANE.
WHAT?!
...OF THE SADNESS OF LOSING ALL THOSE DEAR TO ME.
IT WAS TERRIBLE. HE REMINDED ME...
DO AS I SAY!
HE'S ALREADY DEAD. WHAT THE HELL ELSE DO YOU WANT TO DO TO HIM?

PLEASE STOP THESE FOOLISH THOUGHTS.
KEH...
BODY... WON'T MOVE?!
I'LL DESTROY YOU! EVEN IF I'M DESTROYING MY OWN BODY ...
I WON'T FORGIVE YOU!
THAT FEARSOME PRESENCE. IF I DIDN'T DO SOMETHING, IT WOULD ONLY HAVE GOTTEN WORSE.
IT WAS TOO DISTURBING. I HAD TO KILL HIM.
THAT WAS SCARY...

HE'S--!
HE'S BREATHING AGAIN?!
IT WAS FRIGHTENING.
...I REMEMBERED HOW TERRIBLE...
BY POSSESSING YOU...
YOSHITSUNA-SAMA! LET'S PLAY!
PLEASE TRY SOME! THIS YEAR, THEY'RE FRESH FROM THE FARM.
HEY, YOSHITSUNA! YOU'RE DOING GREAT!
YOU USED TO BE A CRYBABY!
SO...
MY OWN POWER IS TOO STRONG. I'LL USE YOUR POWER...
...PLACE YOUR NANO OVER HIM.
BREATHING
...HNNN
...HNNN
MICHIZANE'S WOUNDS...ARE SEALING UP.
HIS BLOOD IS GOING BACK IN!
GAHH...





IT SEEMS THAT POSSESSING YOU...WAS WRONG.

WE CAN FINALLY TALK FACE TO FACE...
SENJU!

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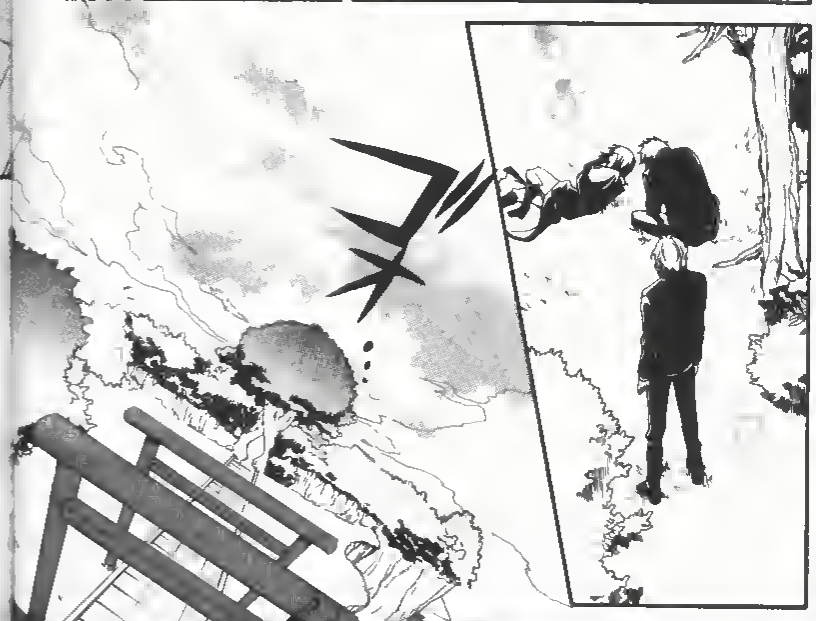
サッ



SO...
ALL YOUR FRIENDS ARE SAFE, HOWEVER.
AGH...
WHY THE LONG FACE?
"IT'S A GREAT SADNESS."
THAT'S RIGHT, HIJIRI. FACING DEATH ISN'T EASY.

YOUR FATHER AND UNCLE...HAVE BOTH BEEN KILLED.
FROM HERE YOU CAN SEE THE ENTIRE VILLAGE...I SAW EVERYTHING.
YOU BRACED YOURSELF FOR THE POSSIBILITY WHEN YOU DECIDED TO COME HERE, DIDN'T YOU?
WHAT...
...DID YOU SAY?

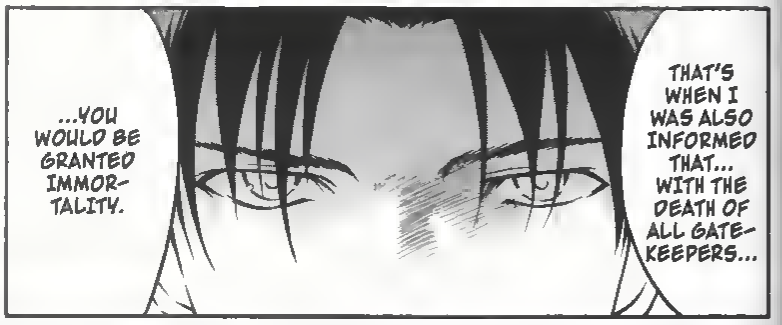
VERY WELL THEN.
.....
I SEE... YOU DON'T APPROVE AFTER ALL.
IS THAT THE KIND OF WORLD... YOU WANT?!
GATE OPEN!
HE OPENED A GATE?!
WH-WHERE IS IT?!
NOW YOU SEE THE VALUE IN OUR MISSION, DON'T YOU?
CREATING A WORLD WITHOUT DEATH!
DON'T...
DON'T SPEAK SUCH FOOLISH THINGS!
WHAT ABOUT NEW LIFE?! IF NO ONE DIES, HOW WILL WE HAVE ROOM ENOUGH FOR NEW LIFE?!
ELIMINATE DEATH? IT SOUNDS GREAT, BUT...
WITHOUT DEATH, OUR WORLD WILL SOON BE OVERCROWDED! WHERE CREATING NEW LIFE IS FORBIDDEN...AND PUNISHED!

?!
Agh!
TSURUGI?!
A BLACK GATE?! WHERE IN HELL DID THAT COME FROM?
!!
ONE DOWN.
NGH...
AGHHH!
TWO DOWN.
THREE DOWN.

WHAT IF I DIE? THEN WILL YOU UNDER-STAND?
WHY... WOULD YOU DO THAT...?
HIJIRI.
STOP IT!
THEY'LL DIE ONE DAY, ANY-WAY.
IT WON'T CHANGE ANYTHING IF THEY DIE NOW.
HOW'S THAT? YOU THINK YOU CAN BEAR THAT PAIN FOREVER?
USH
IT'S-IT'S WRONG! YOU CAN'T ALTER THE RULES OF LIFE AND DEATH JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T LIKE THEM.
YOU STILL WON'T COME AROUND, EH?
PERHAPS WATCHING SOMEONE DIE IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES WILL CONVINCE YOU

I DON'T WANT YOU TO LIVE WITH THAT KIND OF PAIN.
SE-SENJU?!
DIDN'T I TELL YOU NOT TO CLOSE THE CAT'S GATE?! BOTH OF YOU GET OUT!
THE DAY THAT I DISAP-PEARED FROM YOUR LIFE.
IT ALL STARTED... ON THAT DAY.
LIVING FOR ETERNITY, ALL ALONE... WATCHING OTHER PEOPLE DIE.
YOU SHOULDN'T LIVE WITH THAT KIND OF PAIN FOR ETERNITY.
DON'T WORRY SO MUCH ABOUT THE CONSE-QUENCES.
IN TIME, THAT WILL BE YOUR FATE.

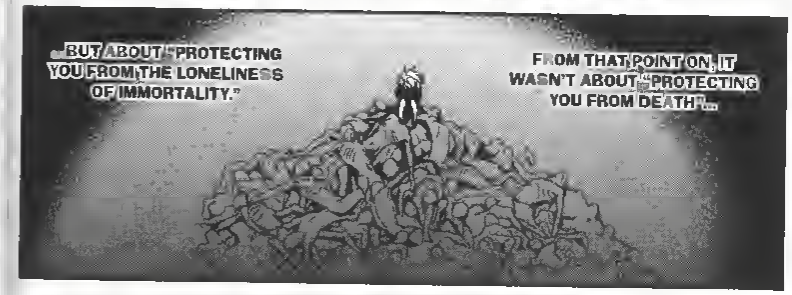
YOSHITSUNA SAIO THAT THE FEAR OF "DEATH" IS AT THE ROOT OF ALL OUR PROBLEMS. IF WE ELIMINATE DEATH, THEN GATE-KEEPERS' LIVES WILL NO LONGER BE AT RISK.



I'M SO WORRIED THAT HIS GATE-KEEPER'S POWERS ARE AWAKENING.
I SAW WHAT HAPPENED TO YOSHITSUNA AND THE REST. I KNOW THAT HIJIRI'S LIFE WILL BE AT GREAT RISK, POSED BY THOSE TARGETING HIS POWER.
CRAP!
THERE IS A WAY TO KEEP THAT CHILD FROM HARM, EVEN AFTER HIS POWERS FULLY AWAKEN.
YOU UNDERSTAND TOO, DON'T YOU?
AND THAT'S WHEN...I HEARD A VOICE.
THAT VOICE... IT COULDN'T BE...
WHO'S THERE?!

THINK ABOUT IT FOR YOURSELF.
...CAN YOU STILL DEAL WITH THE THOUGHT OF BEING ALONE FOR ETERNITY?
KNOWING THAT EVERY-ONE CLOSE TO YOU IS GOING TO DIE...
BY WITNESSING... MY DEATH.

YOUR LIFE WOULD CONTINUE TO BE TARGETED, AND A CRUEL FUTURE WOULD AWAIT YOU.
SO I THOUGHT AS LONG AS DEATH EXISTS...


...BUT ABOUT "PROTECTING YOU FROM THE LONELINESS OF IMMORTALITY."
FROM THAT POINT ON, IT WASN'T ABOUT "PROTECTING YOU FROM DEATH"...

I WON'T FORCE YOU...

AND I SPREAD A RUMOR AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD THAT SENJU IS A CLOSET PERV!
WHA...
AND I SCRIBBLED ALL OVER YOUR T-SHIRT!
HMPH, I ATE YOUR PUDDING!

NO MATTER HOW BAD I AM, YOU ALWAYS SPEAK TO ME POLITELY!
I'M NOT YOSHITSUNA'S SON! I'M HIJIRI!
And who's a closet perv?
WHY HAVE YOU DONE SUCH VILE THINGS?
BE-CAUSE YOU'RE BAD!

HIJIRI-SAMA!
HIJIRI-SAMA!

Hijiri? sama!

HIJIRI-SAMA, WHERE DID YOU RUN TO?
HIJIRI-SAMA!

HIJIRI-SAMA.

H-HOW DID YOU FIND ME?!
UGH... PLEASE DON'T BE A NUISANCE.

GEH HEH HEH HEH!
HEH HEH! GO NUTS! YOU'RE NEVER GONNA FIND ME!

SINCE I WAS BORN, YOU WERE WITH ME EVERY DAY.
YOU'RE MY ONLY FAMILY.
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO TAUGHT ME ALL I KNOW ABOUT THIS WORLD.
YOU ARE MY "WORLD."
SENJU!
HIJIRI!
HIJIRI!

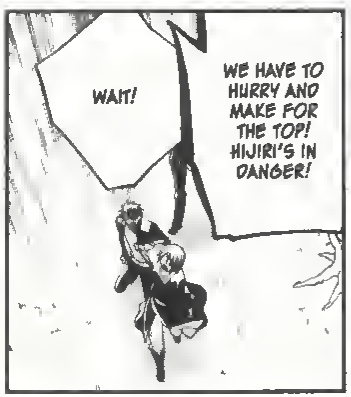
GAH!
JEEZ...
YOU HAVE THE NERVE TO SAY THAT TO ME?
IT WASN'T ME! I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!
SPANK
SPANK
OWWW!
YOU PUT A COCK-ROACH IN MY SHOE, DIDN'T YOU?!
AFTER THAT...
HIJIRI!
HEY, HIJIRI!

CHOOSING TO KILL YOURSELF IS STUPIDLY MASOCHISTIC!
YOU'RE THE BIGGEST, ALL-TIME MORON!
ONE! DON'T DO UNTO OTHERS WHAT YOU WOULD NOT HAVE DONE UNTO YOURSELF!
YOU TAUGHT ME THAT YOURSELF A LONG TIME AGO.
TWO, THREE! DON'T HARM PEOPLE!
AND MORE THAN THAT, DON'T KILL!

UGH... NGH...
...OW, OW!
.....
THEY'RE AWAKE!
THOSE THREE ARE ACTUALLY HEADING UP HERE?
THEY DON'T LEARN, DO THEY?
ARE YOU HURT?!
I'M ALL RIGHT! BUT WHAT ABOUT HIJIRI? HE'S IN DANGER! WE'VE GOT TO HELP HIM!
WHO DO YOU THINK RAISED ME?
EVEN ON MY OWN, I'M CAPABLE OF LIVING AN AMAZING LIFE!
WHY? BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT YOU TAUGHT ME.

ゴゴゴゴゴゴゴ

THEY'RE GROWING OUT OF CONTROL!
ゴゴゴゴ
WHAT?! THE TREES...


WAIT!
WE HAVE TO HURRY AND MAKE FOR THE TOP! HIJIRI'S IN DANGER!

A WALL OF TREES?!
WE'RE CUT OFF FROM HIJIRI!

GIVE IT UP, SENJU! THEY'RE MY GUARDIANS. IT'S FOUR AGAINST ONE.

IF THEY THINK THEY'RE SHOWING UP HERE TO HELP YOU...
ゴゴゴゴ...
?

.....
FOUR AGAINST ONE, EH? WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT.

ゴゴゴゴゴゴゴ
THEY BETTER THINK AGAIN.

IF YOU GO ANY CLOSER, THE TREES WILL SWAL-LOW YOU UP!
WHAT THE---?!
!
WHY ARE WE... BACK IH THE HUMAH WORLD?!
HOW DID WE RETURH?!
HIJIRI!
THEY DI-DISAP-PEARED?!
SEHJU, WHAT DID YOU DO?!
I SEPAR-ATED THE VILLAGE FROM THE HUMAH WORLD.
NOW, YOU AND I ARE THE OHLY ONES LEFT HERE.
WE'RE IH IT FOR THE LOHG HAUL.

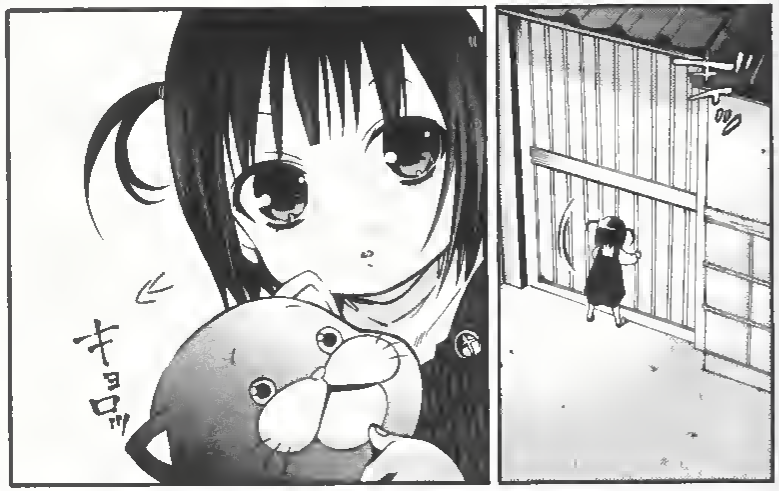
MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED...
WE NEVER SAW HIJIRI AGAIN.
...SINCE THAT FATEFUL CONFRONTATION.
Meow
HE WAS MY FIRST PARTNER AND...
...PROBABLY MY LAST.

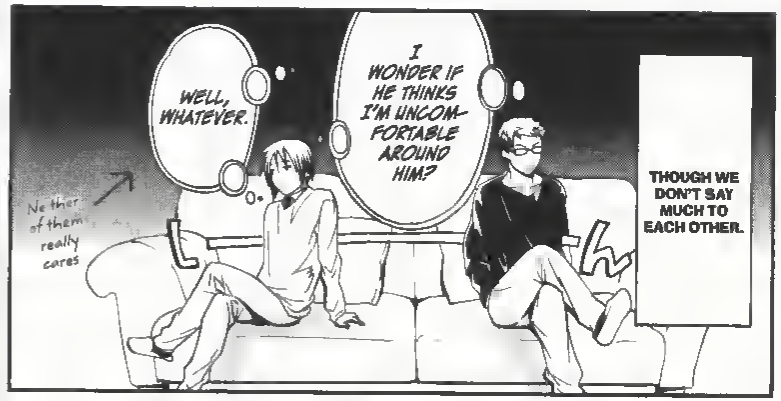
UNTIL YOU FEEL FOR YOURSELF THE PAIN OF LONELINESS.

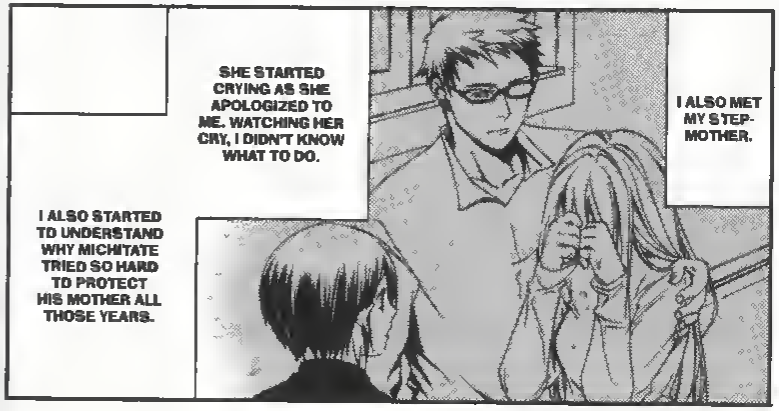
THE YEARS PASSED, BUT HE NEVER CHANGED.
TWO YEARS LATER...THE OTHER TWO WENT TO COLLEGE.
JUST AS ALWAYS... HE NEVER FAILED TO VISIT TSUBAKI'S GRAVE.
THE SAME COLLEGE...WHICH SURPRISED ME, AND PROVED THAT TSURUGI MIGHT BE AN IDIOT, BUT HE'S NOT DUMB.
SO WE GOT TOGETHER OFTEN.
MICHITATE CAME SY TO CHECK UP ON MY STUDYING.

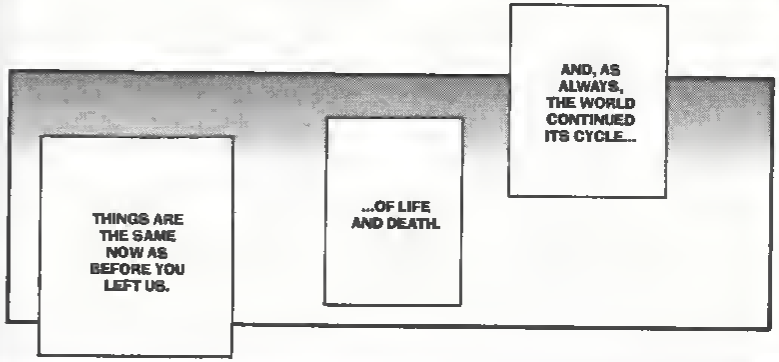
RETURNING FROM OUR BATTLE, WE WERE ALL SO INJURED THAT WE SPENT A LONG TIME IN THE HOSPITAL.
BUT BOTH MICHITATE AND I KNEW IN OUR HEARTS THAT TSURUGI WASN'T THE TYPE TO BETRAY HIS FRIENDS.
WE LISTENED CLOSELY TO THE STORY BEHIND TSURUGI'S BETRAYAL.
...WE TEASED HIM ABOUT IT EVERY CHANCE WE GOT.
DON'T MAKE EXCUSES, BACK-STABBER.
BACK-STABBER
BUT STILL...
YOU TWO, SO I KNOW YOU CAN'T BE KIDDING!
WELL... TO PUT IT ANOTHER WAY, "WE TRUSTED HIM."

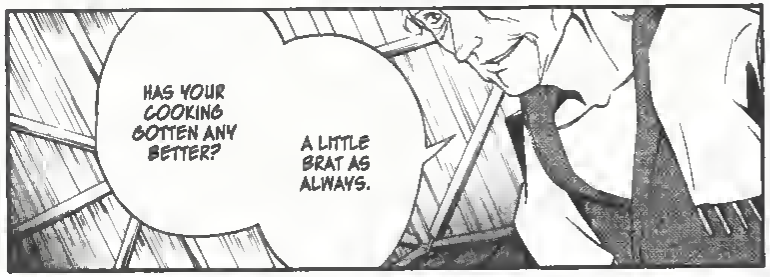
FAST FORWARD...



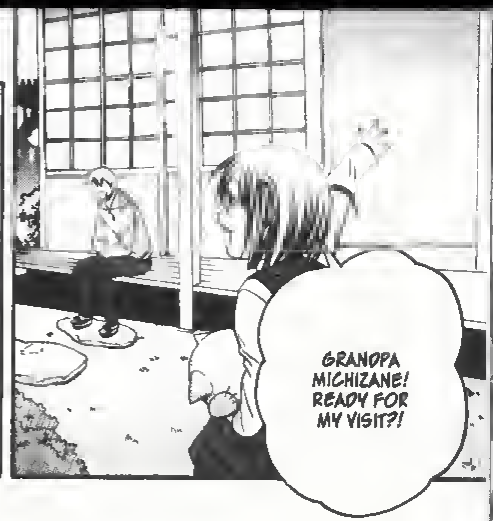

WELL, WHATEVER.
I WONDER IF HE THINKS I'M UNCOMFORTABLE AROUND HIM?
Neither of them really cares
THOUGH WE DON'T SAY MUCH TO EACH OTHER.


I ALSO MET MY STEP-MOTHER.
SHE STARTED CRYING AS SHE APOLOGIZED TO ME. WATCHING HER CRY, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.
I ALSO STARTED TO UNDERSTAND WHY MICHITATE TRIED SO HARD TO PROTECT HIS MOTHER ALL THOSE YEARS.





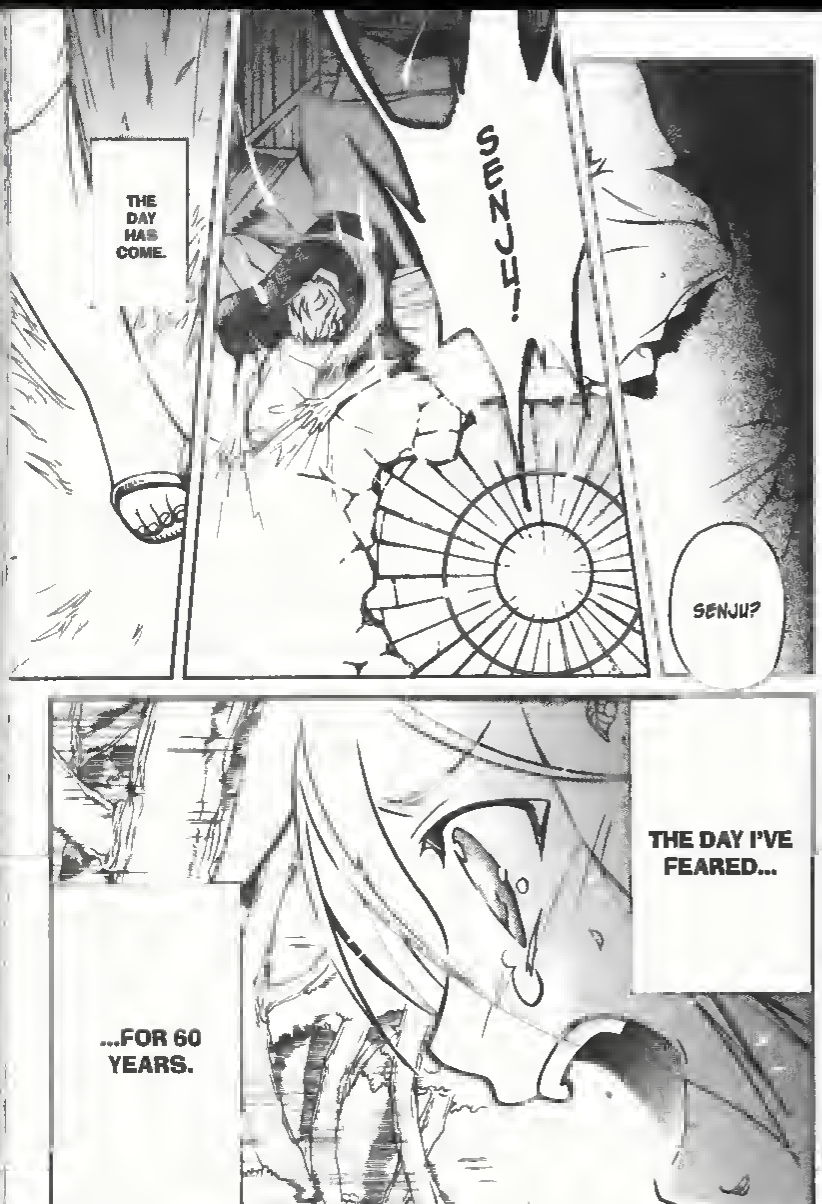
HM? YOU SAY SOMETHING? MY HEARING'S GONE BAD. DIDN'T CATCH WHAT YOU SAID.
UGH. TIRED OF BEING HIS DAMN SERVANT!
YOU HEARD ME, OLD MAN.



LET'S JUMP AHEAD 60 YEARS OF DAYS, MONTHS, SEASONS...

ハハハ
HA HA HA.
CUT IT OUT! THIS IS NOT AN EASY SITUATION FOR ME!
IF YOU DO THAT, I WOULD BE HAPPY...
"AH...I WANT TO CLOSE THE WORLD'S GATES!"
WOULDN'T IT BE NICER...IF I TOO...COULD LIVE FOREVER...?

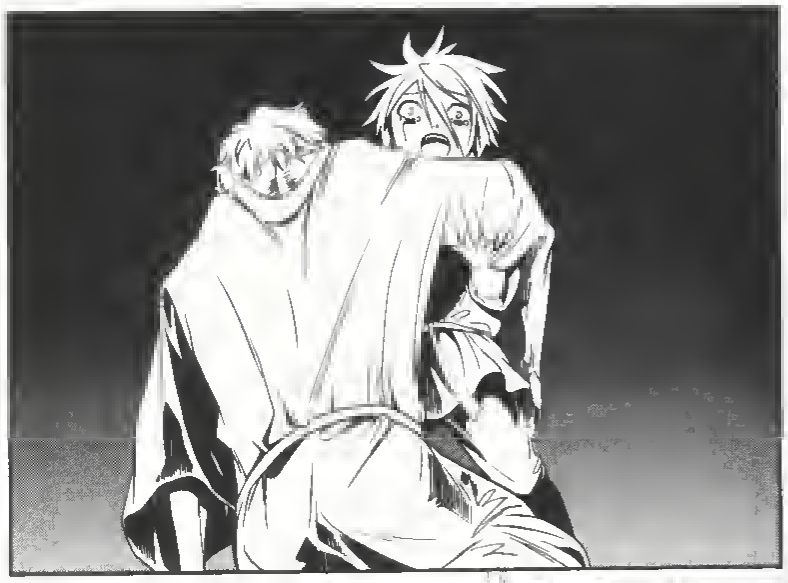
YOU SOUND LIKE A BROKEN RECORD! GIVE IT A REST!
Gimme a break already!
YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT CLOSING THE GATES?
TO BE HONEST, EVERY DAY HAS BEEN UNBEARABLY SCARY.
YOUR HANDS HAVE BECOME SO WRINKLED.
IT'S BEEN 60 YEARS SINCE WE WERE SEALED OFF IN THIS VILLAGE... FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD.
DAY BY DAY, WATCHING SENJU'S BODY WEAKEN.
SOON, WITHOUT DOUBT...
...I WILL BE ALONE.


THE DAY HAS COME.
SENJU!
SENJU?
THE DAY I'VE FEARED...
...FOR 60 YEARS.

HANG ON! I'M GOING TO MAKE A HEALTHY, DELICIOUS MEAL TO REVIVE YOU!
I WON'T LET HIM GET THE BEST OF ME!
AU
AU
AU
AU
It's a lose lose situation no matter what choice he makes!
H-HE'S REALLY FADING FAST...THAT OLD MAN...
I GUESS HE'S GOING TO KICK THE BUCKET SOON.
SENJU! TODAY'S DINNER IS...

IF I UTTER THIS ONE LAST PHRASE, I'LL...
...CHANGE... THE WORLD.
PASS... WORD...
60 YEARS... YOU DID WELL... NOT TO BACK DOWN.
WHA- WHAT THE HECK? WHAT'RE YOU SAYING?
SORRY TO HAVE PUSHED YOU TO THIS...
SENJU!
HIJI... RI...

I-I CAN STILL MAKE IT!
THE GREAT TREE OF SOULS!
...I'LL BRING BACK SENJU!
I-I-I CLOSE ALL THE WORLD'S GATES...
... AND ELIM- INATE DEATH FROM THIS WORLD...
INPUT STARTED! PASSWORD...
CODE NUMBER 00.
MONITOR, EXPAND!

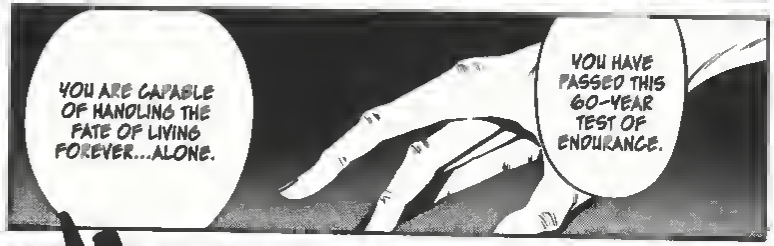


NO!

NO!
NO!
I-I...
NO!
SEN...
JU.

THAT'S RIGHT... YOU WON'T NEED...TO LIVE IN THIS VILLAGE ALL ALONE.
OUTSIDE?! TO THE HUMAN WORLD?!

AFTER I DIE... FIND YOUR WAY TO THE LAST HOUSE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE VILLAGE.
THERE YOU'LL FIND A HIDDEN PASSAGE THAT CONNECTS TO THE OUTSIDE.


YOU ARE CAPABLE OF HANDLING THE FATE OF LIVING FOREVER...ALONE.
YOU HAVE PASSED THIS 60-YEAR TEST OF ENDURANCE.

I COULDN'T... DO...ANYTHING...
I'M SORRY ...
I...

BECAUSE OF MY SELFISHNESS... THE WORLD...

EXECUTING RESERVED PROGRAM.
RESERVED? I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT A "RESERVED PROGRAM"!
REVERSE END ACTIVATION DATA DELETED.
WHAT IS THIS?!

WHAT'S HAPPENING?!
WHAT IS GOING ON?!
I'VE BEEN PREPARING A GIFT FOR MY SON.

OHHH, I'M ABOVE EVERYTHING! MY ARMS AND LEGS ARE GETTING LONGER!
HIJIRI?! LOOK AT YOU!
AND YOU GOT OLDER?! BUT YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO AGE. WHAT'S GOING ON?!
WHAT--? WHAT HAPPENED? HAVE I BEEN REJUVEN-ATED?!
A SECOND AGO, LIGHT FROM MY BODY WAS POURING INTO YOU.
SOME OF MY LIFE FORCE MUST'VE GONE INTO SENJU!
...AND GOING INTO SENJU!
THE LIGHT IS COMING FROM ME
SENJU?!

IT'S THE ONE GIFT THAT I CAN GIVE AS A FATHER.
I'VE LEFT BEHIND A LOT OF TROUBLE FOR HIJIRI. I WANT TO GIVE HIM SOMETHING GOOD.
I CREATED A PROGRAM THAT WILL ACTIVATE WHEN BOTH SENJU AND I HAVE DIED.
I WILL ALWAYS...
MY BELOVED SON...
...WISH FOR YOUR HAPPINESS.

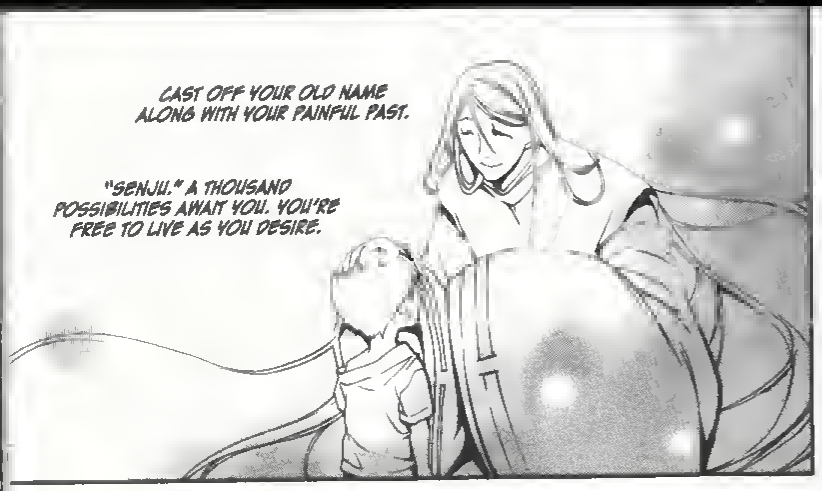
WHO COULD'VE MADE THIS HAPPEN?
FATHER?
I DON'T SEE ANY-THING LIKE A GIFT HERE.
WELL...
ELDER BROTHER, WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?
I'VE BEEN PREPARING A GIFT FOR MY SON.

MAYBE THAT MEANS I'M LIKE AN ORDINARY NUMAN?!
BY SHARING MY LIFE FORCE WITH SENJU, DID I LOSE MY POWER?
ORDINARY... HUMAN?
THE POWER OF THE GATE-KEEPERS IS... DISAPPEARING?!
WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE WORLD WITHOUT GATE-KEEPERS?
BUT WITHOUT GATE-KEEPERS, WHO CAN MAINTAIN THE BALANCE OF LIFE AND DEATH? THERE'LL SOON BE TOO MANY GATES.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
LIKE AN ORDINARY NUMAN...
I'M SUP-POSED TO BE IMMORTAL... BUT IF I AGE...THEN PERHAPS...
...I WILL ONE DAY DIE AS WELL?

UGH... ER... SORT OF.
HIJIRI...ARE YOU OKAY? IS THERE SOME-THING ABOUT YOUR BODY TROUBLING YOU?
FATHER?
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, THERE IS SOMETHING!
MONITOR, EXPAND!
UH... PROGRAM NUMBER 00!
HEY, DO YOU NOT HEAR ME, GREAT TREE OF SOULS?!
Ignore
G-GATE SEARCH! DELETE!

I'M NOT SURE WHY.
NOW AND THEN...I DO "FEEL" HIS PRESENCE.
I NEVER SAW HIJIRI AGAIN.
TIME WENT ON.
OH!
THERE'S A MAN IN THE MOON!
GRANDPA MICHIZANE! LOOK, LOOK!

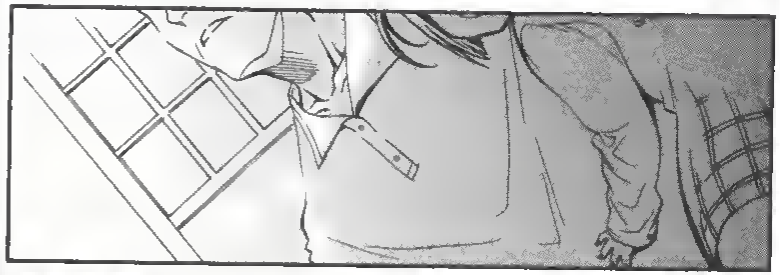
CAN'T MITEDAMASHI FULFILL THAT PURPOSE?


CAST OFF YOUR OLD NAME ALONG WITH YOUR PAINFUL PAST.
"SENJU." A THOUSAND POSSIBILITIES AWAIT YOU. YOU'RE FREE TO LIVE AS YOU DESIRE.

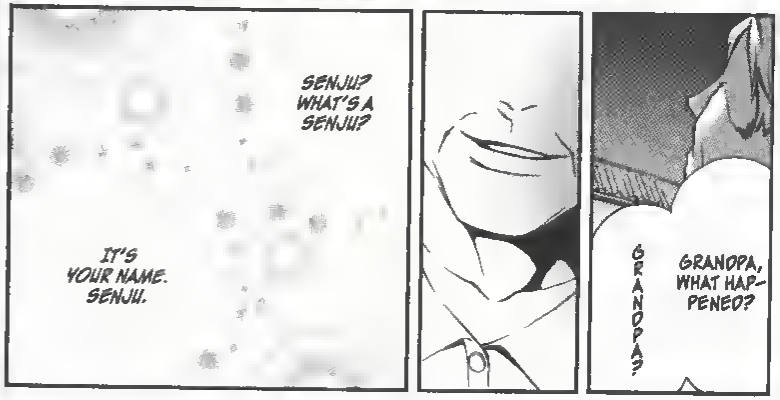
PEOPLE ARE BORN...AND ONE DAY...

...EACH OF THEM DIES.

...AND SOMETIMES WE HOLD A SADNESS THAT CANNOT BE HEALED.
...SOMETIMES WE ARE BOUND TO A PROMISE...
SOMETIMES WE ARE SCORNED BY THOSE WE LOVE...



NOW DON'T YOU WISH YOU'D CLOSED ALL THE WORLD'S GATES FOR GOOD?
ARE YOU STILL OBSESSING ABOUT THAT?
You won't quit will you?
ARGH...CLOSING GATES CAN BE SUCH A PAIN SOMETIMES!



Afterword

HELLO, IT'S SUMIYOSHI AGAIN, THANKING YOU FOR PURCHASING THIS FINAL VOLUME.

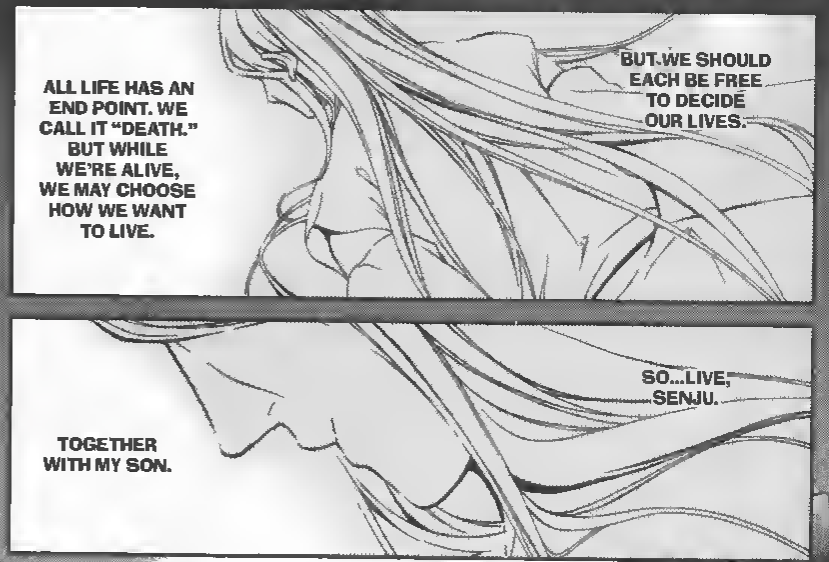
FIRST OF ALL, I'M GRATEFUL TO HAVE SEEN THIS WORK THROUGH ITS FINAL CHAPTER DESPITE SO MANY PROBLEMS! THIS IS MY FIRST SERIALIZED MANGA STORY. I WAS SO EXCITED TO DRAW THIS.

SINCE THIS IS THE FINAL VOLUME, I'D LIKE TO EXPLAIN A BIT OF THE STORY'S BACKGROUND. I GOT THE IDEA FOR IT WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL. IT'S REALLY A REMAKE OF AN "ARABIAN FANTASY BATTLE BETWEEN AN ADULT MALE AND A YOUNG FEMALE." BUT THIS STORY TURNED OUT NOTHING LIKE IT WAS ORIGINALLY ENVISIONED.

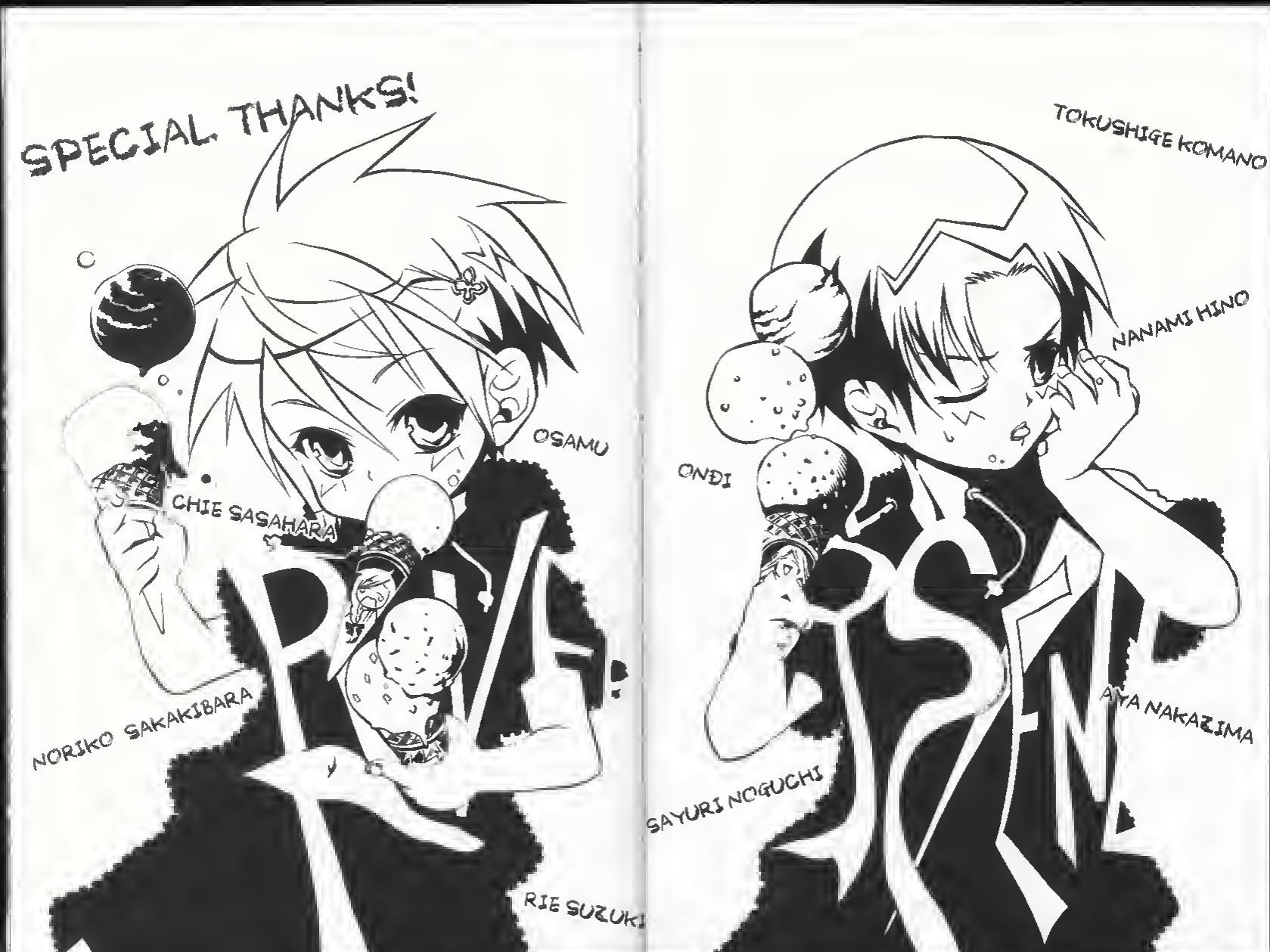
THE WAY IT BEGAN, AND UP 'TIL THE SECOND CHAPTER, HIJIRI WAS SUPPOSED TO "LOOK LIKE A BOY, BUT ACTUALLY BE A GIRL." BUT, DUE TO VARIOUS CONSIDERATIONS, THAT IDEA CHANGED BEFORE LONG, AND I NEVER LOOKED BACK. IT'S SO SURPRISING NOW TO THINK BACK ON MY ORIGINAL IDEA. BUT THAT INITIAL GENDER-BENDING CONCEPT GAVE ME THE NOTION TO DRESS HIJIRI UP IN DRAG IN CHAPTER 3 (LOL). ← (THOUGH, AT FIRST, IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HIJIRI, WHO'S REALLY A GIRL, DRESSING UP AS A GIRL.) ANYWAY, THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I DREW A CHARACTER IN DRAG OUTSIDE OF A GAG COMIC. SO, I WAS REALLY EMBARRASSED, BUT IT ENDED UP BEING SUCH A BLAST (LOL).

THIS BOOK WAS AN ADVENTURE FROM START TO FINISH. IT WAS A HUGE CHALLENGE, AND I GAVE IT MY ALL. I HOPE YOU'LL THINK OF THIS BOOK AS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITES.

LET'S MEET UP AGAIN IN MY NEXT WORK!


ALL LIFE HAS AN END POINT. WE CALL IT "DEATH." BUT WHILE WE'RE ALIVE, WE MAY CHOOSE HOW WE WANT TO LIVE.
BUT WE SHOULD EACH BE FREE TO DECIDE OUR LIVES.
TOGETHER WITH MY SON.
SO...LIVE, SENJU.

REVERSE END


SPECIAL THANKS!
OSAMU
CHIE SASAHARA
NORIKO SAKAKIBARA
RIE SUZUKI
TOKUSHIGE KOMANO
NANAMI HINO
ONDI
AYA NAKAZIMA
SAYURI NOGUCHI